

Cognitive obstructions

According to the Svatantrika tenet system, cognitive obstructions refer to the ignorance that perceives true existence as well as to the seeds of that ignorance.

This is again different from the Prasangika, the proponents of which assert that cognitive obstructions refer to the *imprints* of the ignorance that perceives true existence and to the *imprints* of all other afflictions. According to the Prasangika, the ignorance that perceives true existence, and its seeds, are afflictive obstructions.

Yet both tenet schools agree that in order to attain the enlightened state of a Buddha, Bodhisattvas have to cultivate the wisdom that directly realizes the lack of true existence (emptiness), since it is the only awareness that is able to gradually eliminate the different layers of cognitive obstructions.

	Cognitive obstructions	Direct antidote to cognitive obstructions
Madhyamika Svatantrika	Ignorance that perceives true existence and the seeds of that ignorance	Wisdom that directly realizes the lack of true existence (emptiness)
Madhyamika Prasangika	<i>Imprints</i> of the ignorance that perceives true existence and <i>imprints</i> of all other afflictions	Wisdom that directly realizes the lack of true existence (emptiness)

Elimination of afflictive and cognitive obstructions

The followers of the Svatantrika hold that afflictive and cognitive obstructions can both be divided into intellectually acquired and innate obstructions. Therefore, not only do they assert intellectually acquired and innate *afflictive* obstructions but also intellectually acquired and innate *cognitive* obstructions. Furthermore, Bodhisattvas -who entered the Mahayana path from the outset - overcome the two types of obstructions simultaneously. The uninterrupted path of the path of seeing simultaneously eliminates intellectually acquired *afflictive* and intellectually acquired *cognitive* obstructions, and the uninterrupted paths of each of the ten bhumis of the path of meditation simultaneously eliminate one of the layers of innate afflictive and innate cognitive obstructions. Hence according to the Svatantrika, Bodhisattvas simultaneously achieve the state of an Arhat and a Buddha.

However, the proponents of the Prasangika only categorize afflictive obstructions into intellectually acquired and innate obstructions; they do not categorize cognitive obstructions in this way. Also, as explained before, afflictive and cognitive obstructions are overcome sequentially, with afflictive obstructions being eliminated from the first to the eighth bhumi and cognitive obstructions from the eighth to the tenth bhumi. So Bodhisattvas reach the state of an Arhat before attaining enlightenment.

	Intellectually acquired and innate obstructions	Elimination of afflictive and cognitive obstructions
Madhyamika Svatantrika	Both afflictive and cognitive obstructions can be categorized into intellectually acquired and innate obstructions	Afflictive and cognitive obstructions are eliminated simultaneously
Madhyamika Prasangika	Only afflictive obstruction can be categorized into intellectually acquired and innate obstructions	Afflictive obstructions are eliminated before eliminating cognitive obstructions

Emptiness

The proponents of both the Svatantrika and Prasangika assert that emptiness refers to the lack of true existence. However, they differ in the way they define the lack of true existence, that is, in the way they posit the meaning of the object of negation of emptiness, true existence.

In the Svatantrika School, true existence refers to *that which exists without being posited through the power of appearing to a non-defective awareness*.

Therefore, hypothetically, if a phenomenon were to exist truly it would exist without being posited through the power of appearing to a non-defective awareness, i.e. it would exist without appearing to

a correct consciousness. However, according to the Svatantrika School, something exists only because it appears to a non-defective awareness; it cannot exist without appearing to such an awareness. A non-defective awareness is a correct mind that is non-mistaken with regard to its main object.

For instance, a table exists because it appears to an eye consciousness and to a conceptual consciousness perceiving the table, and it could not exist without appearing to those awarenesses.

Both the eye consciousness perceiving the table and the conceptual consciousness perceiving the table are non-defective awarenesses, for they are non-mistaken with regard to the table.

But according to this tenet school, even though all phenomena lack true existence, they nonetheless exist inherently. They assert that phenomena cannot exist unless they exist inherently and from their own side.

Yet, although they exist inherently and from their own side, they do not exist inherently and from their own side without appearing to a non-defective awareness.

This view of the Svatantrika is illustrated by the example of a magician's illusion. In India it is said that a magician can take ordinary objects such as a pebble and stick, and by casting a mantra, he can cause the pebble and stick to appear as a horse and elephant. The appearance of the pebble and stick as a horse and elephant occurs through the power of a mind affected by the mantra; the appearance does not arise from the pebble and stick without depending on that mind. This is clear to the magician but to his audience it appears that a real horse and elephant are standing in front of them and this appearance seems to be independent of a mind that is affected by the mantra.

Thus, just as the pebble and stick cannot naturally appear as a horse and elephant without depending on a mind that is affected by the mantra, likewise phenomena cannot exist inherently without appearing to a non-defective awareness.

However, the followers of the Prasangika do not differentiate between intrinsic existence and true existence. Therefore, unlike the proponents of the Svatantrika, they do not accept that true existence refers to *that which exists without being posited through the power of appearing to a non-defective awareness*. Likewise they do not accept that emptiness refers to *the lack of existing without being posited through the power of appearing to a non-defective awareness*. The proponents of the Prasangika School argue that the emptiness identified by the Svatantrika - though in accordance with reality - is superficial and that its realization does not result in liberation and Buddhahood.

Also, they find it contradictory for the followers of the Svatantrika, to assert on the one hand, that phenomena are posited through appearing to an awareness and, on the other hand, that they exist inherently.

It is important to understand that both the Svatantrika and the Prasangika Schools contend that phenomena are posited by the power of awareness. Yet they differ greatly about what they mean by that. According to the Svatantrika, the awareness that posits a phenomenon can be conceptual or non-conceptual as long as it is non-defective, i.e. non-mistaken with respect to its main object. The role of the awareness is more passive than in the Prasangika School, for its function is to posit an inherently existent object by way of the object appearing to it.

According to the Prasangika, the awareness by which an object is posited is necessarily a conceptual consciousness which actively imputes/designates the object in dependence on its parts, i.e. on its basis of imputation. It designates verbal conventions, names and qualities to the object. Such imputation/designation is utterly subjective, for the object that is designated is not findable within its basis of imputation. Therefore the object is merely imputed/designated by name and thought without having any objective existence, i.e. without possessing a substantial, intrinsic, and self-instituting essence that exists from its own side and is findable under ultimate analysis.

	Emptiness/Lack of true existence	True existence and inherent existence
Madhyamika Svatantrika	<i>Lack of phenomena existing without being posited through the power of appearing to non-defective awarenesses</i>	Whatever exists lacks true existence, but all phenomena exist inherently
Madhyamika Prasangika	<i>Lack of phenomena existing inherently, objectively, and from</i>	True existence and inherent existence are synonymous, and whatever exists lacks

	their own side	true and inherent existence.
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